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ABSTRACT

Both Mexico and the United States make use of communications technologies for distance education. In the United States, distance learning programs are plentiful. Most focus on a postsecondary level of learning and are planned and carried out by the individual sponsoring institution. A variety of technologies are used, including educational television and communications satellites. The television program "Sesame Street" has been used successfully with young children in both countries, although the Mexican version had to be translated into Spanish and adapted to reflect the cultural values of Mexican society. In Mexico, there are fewer distance education programs. Most that are or have been in use focus on literacy education, and are planned and funded by the government. Radio and television are the most prevalent technologies. Literacy programs for children have included Radioprimaria for fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in rural schools; Telesecundaria for students who have not completed lower secondary (junior high) school; and the Program of Bilingual Radio Support, which teaches Spanish as a second language to monolingual indigenous children. Public television programming has been used successfully in mass media campaigns; and radio and some television have been used since 1965 for "Alphabetizacion," a major, national literacy program for adults. Nonformal radio projects which incorporate direct interaction with local people and give them the opportunity to appear on discussion programs have proved to be more successful with rural people than more formal formats. A 16-item annotated bibliography is provided. (BBM)

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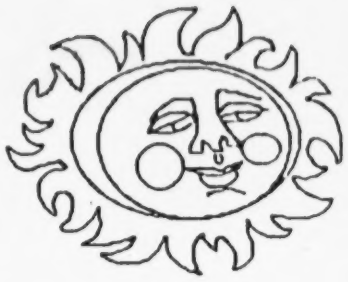

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Similarities and Differences in Distance Education in Mexico and the U.S.

by

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SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN DISTANCE EDUCATION IN MEXICO AND THE U.S.

"Distance education" is a term describing those teaching and learning situations in which the instructor and the learner(s) are geographically separated. Distance education programs, therefore, rely on print, mechanical, or electronic devices to connect teachers with students. Examples of distance education technologies include video or audio teleconferencing, home study television courses ("telecourses"), radio or audio cassette instruction, satellite, microwave or videotaped teaching, correspondence coursework, and computer conferencing. Strictly speaking, distance education must always include provision for feedback from the learners to the teacher; this is what distinguishes distance teaching from simple educational

broadcasting (Holmberg, 1981). For this paper, however, a broader definition will be used -- one that includes instructional broadcasting -- in order to encompass enough examples to make up a comparative study.

The need for a more inclusive definition of distance education in order to compare U.S. and Mexican distance learning systems points up the first difference between the two: literature on American distance education is quite plentiful; finding resources on Mexican distance education, however, is much more difficult. No doubt this difference is attributable in part to not all literature relating to distance teaching and learning in Mexico being written in, or translated into, English, or appearing in American journals. The major reason for the difference in available resources, however, appears to be that Mexico, with its national system of education, has not as yet made much use of telecommunications for instructional uses. Indeed,

Riding writes in his 1984 treatise that "to date, the (Mexican) government has barely explored the educational possibilities of television."

Distance Education for Children

Distance learning can be designed for either adult learners or for children. In terms of distance education for children, one learning format held in common by both the U.S. and Mexico is the popular preschool television series "Sesame Street." Children's Theater Workshop, the original creators of "Sesame Street" has worked with Televisa, the dominant Mexican TV network, to convert the learning series into "Plazo Sésamo" for Mexican children (Riding, 1984). "Plazo" was not just a translation of the American program into another language, but, rather, was developed as a completely new production adapted to the Mexican culture and used to develop cognitive skills (Díaz-Guerrero and

Holtzman, 1974) as well as to spread family values among Latin American children (Riding, 1984). Studies by Diaz-Guerrero et al determined it necessary to completely transform many of the original American scripts because they did not produce the same effect on Mexican children they had on American children. For example, on a number of occasions the original scripts distorted certain behavioural guidelines considered positive for the Mexican culture. Specifically, while the American child tends to be competitive the Mexican student is cooperative. This kind of cultural difference can lead to different cognitive or learning styles (Escotet, 1983). The Mexican reworking was evidently successful in the cognitive domain, as preschool children in daycare centers tested in 1974 were found to have significant learning gains if they were in the experimental group which had consistently watched "Plazo

Sésamo," as compared to the daycare center's control group (Díaz-Guerrero and Holtzman, 1974).

While "Plazo Sésamo" is unique in Mexico, "Sesame Street" is but one of many, many educational broadcasts available to American children. The March 8, 1987 Sunday Register TV and Cable Guide for central Iowa, for example, shows instructional programming for preschool and school age children as being broadcast on weekdays continuously from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the United States, one national television network -- the Public Broadcast System (PBS) -- is dedicated solely to educational and instructional programming and is largely supported by government funds. In Mexico, the government only has free access to 12 1/2% of Televisa's airtime for cultural, educational and other public interest programming. Even so, it has rarely filled its quota (Riding, 1984).

In both Mexico and the U.S. some locally-specific distance education systems have been used to reach school-age children in the more isolated rural areas of the country. The intent of these programs has been to provide to sparsely-populated regions education of comparable quality to the instruction received by children in urban areas. For example, in the U.S. satellite technology has been in use for a number of years to teach children in the isolated Appalachian mountain region. Closer to home are the telecommunications modes being used to supplement high school instruction available to young learners in the rural parts of the state of Iowa. Microwave television is currently being used to offer four years of Spanish, pre-calculus, psychology, sociology and anatomy to high school students in the small community of Morning Sun (Roos, 1987).

In Mexico, the story of distance education for children focuses more on radio than on television. For example, in 1955 Jesuit missionaries began a radio school in a mountainous rural area called the Sierra Tarahumara in an effort to reach widely dispersed indian children and provide them with a primary education. Armed with a primary education, the children would then be encouraged to enroll in a conventional school after the fourth grade. The schools based their content on the official curriculum, including the official set of free primary school textbooks. Two teachers from a primary normal school taught all the classes. Each location also had local tutors. By 1971 there were forty-six schools enrolling 1,081 students from ten municipalities.

Problems with the Jesuit radio schools included children having difficulties with getting to classes regularly, and broadcasts being conducted in Spanish even

though most of the Tarahumara Indian children spoke only their own language. Furthermore, as the programs evolved, the local tutor became the focal point of the project and the radio programs became the adjunct, rather than the other way around as intended. Overall results did not, in general, meet the government's goals of integrating the Tarahumara into national life and moving them toward a market economy. Even those children who did finish the fourth grade either did not use their education for different kinds of work in the community, or left the community never to return (Sotelo, 1973).

Another descriptive report written the same year as Sotelo's describes the "radioprimaria" project begun in San Luis Potosi, Mexico in 1970 (Spain, 1973). Radioprimaria consisted of radio classes for fourth, fifth and sixth graders in rural areas. Although children educated through radioprimaria obtained achievement scores as high as

children taught in traditional classrooms, the project was considered to be problematic and plagued with difficulties. For one thing, basic implementation was left to individual teachers. Consequently there were many variations in implementation of the program from school to school. About half of the sites did not even have an audible, functioning radio to work with. The rather grandiose goals for radioprimaria were also never met. Although education was valued by the rural people as a means to better jobs and a more affluent lifestyle in the cities, the reality for most students minimally-educated in rural areas was a city slum already jammed with rural people, and more educated people than available jobs. Spain's (1973) final summary of the project in his report was a discouraging one: "Although radioprimaria is useful in the process of rural education, rural education, given current conditions, is hardly useful at all." Villa (1982) states that in current publications

of the Mexican ministry of education radioprimaria is not mentioned. The only program mentioned currently using radio is the Programa de Apoyo Radiofónico Bilingüe (Program of Bilingual Radio Support), which teaches Spanish as a second language to monolingual indigenous children.

There is a distance teaching program for young learners in Mexico that uses television. "Telesecundaria" provides lower secondary (junior high) education by television to urban or rural students who have not completed lower secondary school. Telesecundaria students are exempt from taking an entrance exam, but must meet all other admissions requirements of traditional lower secondary schools. The general lower secondary curriculum is followed utilizing thirty hours a week in class, with each hour including a 20-minute televised lesson and a forty-minute follow-up lesson with an in-person classroom instructor (Villa, 1982).

Distance Education for Adults

In the United States examples of distance education programs designed for adult learners are plentiful. Most are run by individual colleges or schools, based on to the needs and interests of the clientele they serve. Over eighty such programs are described in Lewis' 1983 survey of American colleges and universities. Many of the programs Lewis reseearched offer courses for credit or even entire degree programs utilizing various telecommunications technologies. Patterned on, or inspired by the success of, the British Open University, these programs meet the needs of adults who cannot free themselves up to move to a college town and attend daytime classes on campus, but who wish to return to school to finish a degree or to start a new one. Other distance education programs for adults in this country are non-credit teleconferences, bringing together professionals from a variety of locations to receive updates

and training on new developments in their field via satellite, audio teleconferencing, or computer communications technologies. Adults in the U.S. also have a variety of educational programs available to them through the Public Broadcasting System, mostly carried by during the evenings and on weekends.

On the more local level Iowa State University offers four types of distance education: telecourses, audioteleconferenced courses, videotaped courses, and satellite courses. Telecourses utilize nationally-produced video lessons broadcast weekly over Iowa Public Television. The broadcast lessons are accompanied by textbooks, a student study guide, and a syllabus of readings and assignments designed by an ISU faculty member. Videotaped courses capture an on-campus class in session; the tapes are then mailed to sites of interested students who view them "after the fact" while completing the same written and

reading assignments as their on-campus counterparts. Audio teleconferenced courses are taught live via conference phone call to groups of students in several locations. And satellite courses are taught live via satellite to sites equipped with downlink receiving equipment. Iowa State also participates in the National University Teleconference Network which distributes non-credit conferences and shortcourses by satellite to locations all around the country.

Although most distance education programs in the U.S. are geared towards college-level credit or non-credit instruction, there is evidence of broadcast television being used in recent years for literacy and basic mathematical training for adults who have not graduated from high school, or who have not completed the eighth grade. One such program is "Project Second Chance" which Iowa Public Television recently began broadcasting. The "Second Chance"

series provides basic instruction in reading, writing and mathematics for adults who have dropped out of school in their youth years. Student workbooks and computer disk supplements accompany the television series, and tutors are available to assist Iowa adults at local community colleges (Hartwig, 1987).

Mexico has also made use of public television programming to reach adults. A 1980 article by the Agency for International Development describes a mass media campaign designed to promote the idea of family planning and the use of contraceptive products. The campaign, which was evaluated as highly successful in achieving its goals, included printed literature, displays of products in local grocery and drug stores, and a series of "soap opera" type vignettes on broadcast television (AID, 1980).

Unlike the United States, however, the use of distance learning methods for higher education is not common in Mexico. The Monterrey Institute of Technology (ITESM) was one of the first higher education institutions in Latin America to introduce an Open High School, described as being founded on the experiences of the British Open University (Escotet, 1983). It is not clear from the available literature, however, whether or not Monterrey's open high school makes use of telecommunications in its program delivery. Systems of educacion a distancia are also listed by Villa in her 1982 volume as having been established by ITESM and the Regional Technical Institutes (ITR). These programs are described as ones in which students prepare for exams on their own, using textbooks or workbooks recommended or sold by the institution offering the program. A professor is made available to assist as needed. The institution then holds exams, and successful graduates'

transcripts specify that an open system was used. This form of distance education is basically a system of credit by examination, with some assistance provided by the sponsoring institution for the student's self-study (Villa,1982).

The use of radio for literacy education for adults has been the most prevalent form of distance teaching in Mexico as described in the literature. Since 1965 Mexico has been using radio and some television for a major, national literacy program entitled "Alphabetización." The government's free access time on commercial broadcast networks is utilized for the broadcasts, which are accompanied by print materials. The program begins with teaching the alphabet and proceeds through basic reading and writing skills. One hundred thrity radio stations and twelve television stations were broadcasting "Alphabetización" in 1970. In most cases students follow the lessons on their own, but in some areas groups of

students have banded together to hire an on-site teacher. One recognized problem of "Alphabetización" has been that once the adults complete the course they do not have enough reading material available in their village or area to maintain their newly-acquired skills. Hence many are not able to maintain the progress they made in learning to read and write (Lowry, 1970).

About the same time as "Alphabetización," a nonformal education radio project was begun in Huayacoctla, a village in Veracruz. In the 1960s a radio receiver was installed in a literacy center and a tutor was appointed to supervise the project. The broadcasts used were produced by the national ministry of education; printed texts were also used. Villagers and campesinos attended the center at four o'clock in the afternoon after the fieldwork was done. The curriculum centered on grammar, arithmetic, history, geography and civics. Radio Project 1, as this program came

to be called, was not successful in helping to integrate the people in the village environs into their communities, which was one of the stated intents of the project. In fact, the program turned out to nurture individualism instead. People with some education began to migrate to the cities, increasing the problem "back home." Those who received the education and stayed in the local area became frustrated because they could not use their education to get better jobs in the community. Radio Project 1 ended in the mid-1970s (Ginsburg and Arias-Godínez, 1984).

Radio Project 1's successor was Radio Project 2. Project 2 had two formats: (1) open broadcast, which had no immediate involvement with the listeners (as in Project 1), and (2) closed broadcasting, which incorporated direct interaction with particular groups. Some of the staff of Radio Project 2 were local people who served as broadcasters, disc jockeys and secretaries. The organizers

planned the program, but relied extensively on input from the campesinos and local people. Broadcasts were carried from 2 to 8 p.m. and included news, news forums, educational and recreational programs, music (both commercial and local campesino productions) and special programs (Ginsburg and Arias-Godínez, 1984).

In a show called "News from the Mountains" the rural people contributed local news items for the show. Another program called "What Did the News Tell You?" had local people appearing on the radio discussion program analyzing current news developments, giving their opinions, and telling how the news developments affected them. "From the Fields" was an agriculture program offering advice in the format of answering questions submitted by the campesinos. "Mexican Laws" taught campesinos about land-holding and other rights they had and could exercise. Also, a monthly radio program entitled "Our Music" presented original

compositions of the campesinos and also played commercial music selections by request (Ginsburg and Arias-Godínez, 1984).

The results of Radio Project 2 were vastly different from that of its predecessor. Project 2 achieved active participation on the part of the local people which, in turn, developed a more positive self-image among campesinos. Hearing their own voices on the radio aided the self-esteem of the participants. The Project enhanced cohesion and a sense of community, and allowed the people to find a channel of communication for their concerns, their interests, and their perceptions of the world (Ginsburg and Arias-Godínez, 1984).

Summary

Both Mexico and the United States make use of communications technologies for distance education. In the U.S., distance learning programs are plentiful. Most focus on a post-secondary level of learning and are planned and carried out by the individual sponsoring institution. A variety of technologies are used. In Mexico, distance education programs are fewer and farther between. Most that are or have been in use focus on literacy education, and are planned and funded by the government. Radio and television are the most prevalent technologies.

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1. Agency for International Development. "Development Communication in an Urban Setting." Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse on Development Communication, July, 1980. Applications of development communications to the problems of delivering social services to poorer segments of urban areas. Included is a brief description of Mexico's mass media campaign promoting the use of contraceptives.

2. Daniel, John S., Martha A. Stroud and John R. Thompson, eds. Learning at a Distance -- A World Perspective. Edmonton, Canada: Athabasca University/International Council for Distance Education, 1982. A collection of papers presented at the 1982 Vancouver world conference on distance education. Collectively the articles describe the state of the art of distance education in the early 1980s. Over 120 authors and 25 countries are represented.

3. Díaz-Guerrero, Rogelio and Wayne H. Holtzman. "Learning by Televised 'Plaza Sésamo' in Mexico," Journal of Educational Psychology 66:5, October, 1974, 632-43. Mexican children in day-care centers were tested to assess whether or not significant cognitive gains were associated with those who consistently watched the Mexican adaptation of "Sesame Street." Significant gains were recorded for the experimental group as compared to the control group.

4. Escotet, Miguel Angel. "Adverse Factors in the Development of an Open University in Latin America," Distance Education -- International Perspectives, edited by David Sewert, Desmond Keegan and Borje Holmberg. London: Croom Helm, 1983. Enumerates the many changes and adaptations needed when taking ideas from other distance education systems and using them in Latin America. The overall book is a collection of key international distance education articles published 1973-83.

5. Feasley, Charles E. Serving Learners at a Distance: A Guide to Program Practices. Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Higher Education/ Clearinghouse on Higher Education, 1983. Excellent primer on distance teaching. Describes role of the instructor, role of the institution, and various telecommunications technologies currently in use.

6. Ginsburg, Mark B. and Beatriz Arias-Godínez. "Nonformal Education and Social Reproduction/Transformation: Educational Radio in Mexico," Comparative Education Review 28:1, February, 1984. 116-27. Description of a nonformal educational radio project begun in the 1960s, and analysis of appropriate approaches to take in designing nonformal education for village and rural peoples. Includes a comparison of the early and later radio projects in Veracruz, Mexico.

7. Hartwig, John. Memo entitled " 'Project Second Chance' Telecast Schedule over Iowa Public Television from September 15, 1987 through April 16, 1988." Des Moines, Iowa: Department of Public Instruction, January 20, 1987. Internal memo describing adult basic education and high school completion instruction available via public television in Iowa.

8. Holmberg, Borje. Status and Trends of Distance Education. London: Kogan Page, 1981. Discusses various aspects of distance education with an eye toward clarifying the concept of distance study and the principles underlying it. Topics covered include philosophy of distance education, course development, communication in distance study, evaluating distance study, and the economy of distance learning.

9. Lewis, Raymond J. Meeting Learners' Needs Through Telecommunications: A Directory and Guide to Programs. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1983. Detailed descriptions of 80+ distance education programs operated by U.S. colleges and universities. Programs delivered by television, videotape, satellite, audio teleconferencing, cable television, ITFS and computers are included. The introductory section contains descriptive data on the state of American distance education programming and charts outlining the levels of coursework offered and communications delivery systems used.

10. Lowry, Dennis T. "Radio, TV and Literacy in Mexico," Journal of Broadcasting 14:2, Spring, 1970. 239-44. Literacy programs have been delivered in Mexico via radio and print materials since 1965, specifically the "Alphabetizacion" program. This article describes the basic workings of such a program.

11. Riding, Alan. Distance Neighbors -- A Portrait of the Mexicans. New York: Random House, 1984. Very readable description of the Mexican social, psychological, economic and political systems from pre-Spanish times to the present. A number of references to the educational system are made, including a couple of comments on the use of radio and television for educating those at a distance from the primary population centers.

12. Roos, Jonathon. "Small Schools Fight for Life with Innovation and Gadgets," Des Moines Sunday Register, March 1, 1987, 1A and 4A.. Iowa rural schools use satellite and other technology to bring in instruction they cannot provide on site.

13. Rumble, Greville and Keith Harry, eds. The Distance Teaching Universities. London: Croom Helm, 1982. Describes the higher education institutions devoted solely to distance education that sprung up in the 1970s with the advent of new telecommunications systems. Institutions profiled include the British Open University, China's Central Broadcasting and Television University, the Fernuniversitat of West Germany, Cost Rica's Universidad Estatal a Distancia, Israel's Everyman's University, the Allama Iqbal Open University of Pakistan and Spain's Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia.

14. Sotelo, Sylvia Schmelkes de. "The Radio Schools of the Tarahumara Mexico: An Evaluation." Stanford, California: Stanford University/California Institute for Communication Research, March, 1973. An evaluation of the 1955 Jesuit radio school provided to rural children in the mountainous Sierra Tarahumara region of Chihuahua, Mexico. Results revealed radio schools had been most useful to those not disadvantaged, making integration of the rural Indians into the national culture and economy even more difficult than before.

15. Spain, Peter I. "A Report on the System of Radio-primaria in the State of San Luis Potosi, Mexico." Stanford, California: Stanford University/California Institute for Communication Research, March, 1973. The Radioprimaria project provided classes by radio to fourth, fifth and sixth graders in rural areas to make up for a lack of teachers in those parts of Mexico. Children who learned via radioprimaria had achievement scores as high as those taught in traditional classrooms. Nonetheless, the project was problematic in that those so trained were not able to use their new skills in their homeland area.

16. Villa, Kitty. Mexico: A Study of the Educational System of Mexico and a Guide to the Academic Placement of Students in Educational Institutions of the United States. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 1982. Describes the educational system of Mexico in terms of programs, degrees, certificates and qualifications. Includes guidelines for U.S. admissions officers for academic placements of Mexican students in U.S. institutions. Brief